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**Transform the trade show floor: new technologies help make the most of
attendee visits to exhibitors. (The Tech Files).**

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TEXT:

I remember, back in 1987, discussing a Star Wars-themed exhibit hall using lasers and scannable badges that was going to transform trade shows. Everyone looked at me like I had two heads. Today, beaming information is the hot topic at trade shows, and some providers are making it possible to collect exhibitor information without even entering the show floor--not necessarily a great idea, but one of the new technologies in play.

Making this possible is the wide acceptance of both PDAs (personal digital assistants) and wireless capability. These technologies allow attendees armed with PDAs to synch up quickly with the latest meeting information at automated kiosks set up throughout a conference.

SERVICES TO EXPLORE

Several providers of on-site kiosks and synching stations have become veterans in the business.

Event-to-go from Eventcentric (www.eventcentric.com) combines a Web presence with on-site kiosks to update information. Using the Palm operating system, Event-to-go lets the planner load the information to the Internet, including floor plans, news feeds and full content of presentations. Attendees download the information they need before the meeting and later update it at the kiosks. In addition, attendees can fill out a digital Event Info card and beam it to exhibitors, who can then export the data to a PC.

A similar service is available from ExpoExchange's ExpoView product (www.expoexchange.com). Extra components include the ability to survey attendees via their PDAs and an event-only messaging system.

Computer Architechs International (www.caicorp.com) offers kiosks that provide all the meeting details, serve as cyber-cafe depots, and provide Internet access and event-only e-mail. Ports allow attendees to update information on their PDAs. An exhibitor locator and profile section lets companies advertise prizes and/or giveaways at their booths.

BCard.net makes use of smart cards with the bCard Handheld Lead Retrieval Solution (www.bcard.net/genInfo/palmreader.asp). The host creates a questionnaire for attendees, the responses to which are encoded on their cards. Exhibitors then plug a card reader into a PDA, which extracts the questionnaire information with an option to add notes. Exhibitors can off-load the leads to their sales management systems.

In some cases these systems and kiosks have been set up to permit attendees to browse exhibitors and request information without visiting the actual booths. While this might seem like the solution of the future,

interpersonal contact is lost, and the event quickly becomes an on-site virtual trade show.

COMING SOON

The next evolution will be like the technology that is coming to malls and grocery stores. Imagine putting your **shopping** list into your **PDA** and then, as you wander down the **aisles** of a store (or a trade **show**), information about the products or the exhibitor's offering are beamed to your **PDA**, allowing you to make the buying (or stopping) decision right then.

In the above scenario, you would profile what you are looking for--type of technology, type/location/price range/dates for a meeting--and the exhibitor would provide similar information, which would be matched. If you walk past a property that meets your requirements and has space available on your dates, its information pops up on your handheld, and the discussions begin.

To stay abreast of these developments, check out the Kiosks.org Association (www.kiosk.org), a new resource with lots of useful links.

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